

Try Something New at The Steel Yard

The Steel Yard, located in the industrial valley of Providence, allows aspiring artists or anyone who wants to learn something new to take classes in many different art and technical programs as a way of fulfilling its goal: to create a community where individuals can practice arts with others.

I had the pleasure of sitting down with the associate director, Islay Taylor, and the communications and events manager, Chris Dalpe. Islay (pronounced Eye-Lah), is in charge of working with the class instructors, students and professional artists, and she also runs the educational portion of the yard and does job training. Chris handles public projects and The Steel Yard's website and social media, and is the ideal person to tell the story of the Yard's history.

The Steel Yard consists of a 3.8-acre courtyard used as a venue for events and available to artists who want to use it. It also has open studios, and anyone who takes a course gets access to them. Artists are encouraged to join the residency program where they can strengthen their practices. In order to make all these resources available to a variety of people, scholarships are offered to those who are interested in taking a course.

Through its public projects, The Steel Yard collaborates with artists to create public sculptures that are functional and interesting to look at. Public projects allow art to be intertwined with everyday life. The sculptures range from bike racks to trash cans to benches. Some of these public projects can be seen in North Kingstown or Providence.

Islay is focused on creating jewelry, and for a while she was an instructor of one the many classes offered. "I love the idea of sharing. I paid so much money for an education, but I can give that here," she says. Islay became interested in jewelry work after she realized that the tools needed to create other, larger objects were hard to come by after she was out of college. "Creating jewelry allowed me to do the same thing I was doing before, just on a smaller scale with more accessible tools." She has her own studio practice and makes giant necklaces that are shown in museums or galleries.

Steel Yard classes are offered in ceramics, blacksmithing, iron casting, welding and jewelry-making. A class featured is a "build your own firepit" class, which teaches people how to make their own cozy backyard sanctuary.

Islay has taken many ceramics classes as well as a mold-making class. "I realized it's very hard for me to make ceramics because I keep ending up with an ashtray-looking object," she says. Chris, on the other hand, is new to The Steel Yard and has yet to take a class. "I'll be participating in a two-day welding class, which I'm very excited about! All new first-hand experiences," he expresses.

When asked which was the most popular class, they told me that all classes are popular, but blacksmithing seems to be the most popular. "You really can't find those tools or that space elsewhere," said Chris.

The Steel Yard is a very popular place during the summer months and it's packed almost every weekend. Check out the Leadership RI Block Party, which will take place June 7 at 5pm. The event is free and will have food, drinks, music and work from all departments of The Steel Yard.